

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

180754Z Nov 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 08 TEL AVIV 006545

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA  
HQ USAF FOR XXXX  
DA WASHDC FOR SASA  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA  
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR  
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

-----  
SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
-----

- [1](#)1. Labor vs. Likud
- [1](#)2. Gaza: Management of Border Crossings

-----  
Key stories in the media:  
-----

All media led with PM Sharon's announcement, expected during the weekend, as to whether he will remain in the Likud or form a new party. Both Yediot and The Jerusalem Post reported that Sharon's advisers are recommending that he leave the Likud. Israel Radio quoted FM Silvan Shalom as saying in Tunisia that, were Sharon to quit the Likud, there would be more than two candidates for Likud leadership. The radio said that Shalom was hinting he would vie for party chairmanship. The Jerusalem Post quoted Labor Knesset Member Yuli Tamir, a key political ally of Labor Party Chairman Amir Peretz, as saying on Thursday that there "isn't much of a difference" between the Likud and the Labor parties when it comes to the peace process and the Palestinians.

Yediot reported that Communications Minister Dalia Itzik (Labor) held a one-on-one meeting with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas in Tunis on Thursday. Palestinian Deputy Prime Minister and Information Minister Nabil Shaath and the PA Communications Minister reportedly attended the first part of the meeting. Yediot reported that Abbas asked Itzik for an update of the political situation in Israel, and that Abbas informed her about the Palestinian elections campaign. The newspaper reported that Abbas told Itzik: "We need your help. And the best help is for you not to intervene." Yediot reported that the two discussed the fight against anti-Israel incitement in the PA. Abbas was quoted as saying that it had totally ceased, to which Itzik allegedly replied: "This only goes to prove that if you want, you can."

Ha'aretz quoted sources affiliated with the liberal wing of the New York Jewish community as saying that leaders of the community encouraged Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to intervene aggressively in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute over the Gaza border crossings. The leaders reportedly also urged her to press the PA to meet its commitments to fight terror. Ha'aretz reported that among others, Rice met in Washington earlier this month with the heads of the left-wing Israel Policy Forum, who expressed their views on various aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The newspaper reported that following the meeting, the forum also sent Secretary Rice a policy paper in which it urged the U.S. to take "aggressive" action on three issues -- unambiguous efforts by the PA to control terror; an Israeli freeze on settlements and removal of illegal outposts; and efforts to help the Palestinian economy grow. The position paper reportedly states that this effort would help

strengthen the PA's position among the various Palestinian factions, including Hamas.

Quartet Special Envoy James Wolfensohn was quoted as saying in an interview with Ha'aretz that there is a need to recognize the desire of the Palestinians to have hope and to have a life for themselves and their children. Wolfensohn was quoted as saying that he was not suggesting that in order to achieve this, Israel has to give up its fundamental right to security and safety.

The Jerusalem Post features an extensive interview with Dina Habib Powell, the highest-ranking Arab-American in the State Department, "and perhaps in the entire Bush administration."

Leading media reported that two members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Fatah's military wing, were killed on Thursday during an IDF operation near Jenin. The clash reportedly erupted after IDF Special Forces set up a roadblock. Israel Radio reported that the Erez crossing with the Gaza Strip was closed this morning, following an alert that terrorists intend to carry out an attack there.

Israel Radio reported that the IDF has raised the alert level at its outposts along the Lebanese border, due to the possibility of an attack by Hizbullah.

Ha'aretz wrote that Israel is continuing construction in the West Bank. The newspaper reported that on Thursday, the Israel Lands Administration issued building tenders for 13 lots in Ma'aleh Adumim, while the Construction and Housing Ministry issued tenders for building infrastructure in Ariel, Ma'aleh Adumim, and Adam. The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that in a gesture designed to heighten public awareness of the plight of the 80,000 Israelis living outside the security fence, Knesset Members Colette Avital (Labor) and Avshalom Vilan (Meretz-Yahad) plan to file a bill on Monday offering money to compensate those who want to move.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli officials as saying Thursday that "in another significant step forward in relations between Tunisia and Israel," Tunisia authorized a commercial flight between the two countries, which have no official diplomatic relations. Maariv reported that on Thursday, a senior Qatar Airways official denied that his company signed a special prorated agreement with the Israeli airline Arkia.

The Jerusalem Post, Maariv, and Israel Radio reported that Pope Benedict XVI responded positively to an invitation from President Moshe Katsav to visit Israel when the two met in the Vatican on Thursday. The media reported that Katsav told reporters that the papal visit may take place as early as next year. Ha'aretz reported on the acceleration of Israel-Vatican talks on the status of Catholic Church properties in Israel, driven by President Bush's intervention. Ha'aretz notes that Bush told Sharon recently that he must end the stalemate over the issue of special tax exemptions to the Vatican, after which Sharon ordered that the issue be handled urgently. The Jerusalem Post notes that Israel and the Vatican have resolved most of the issues under dispute.

Leading media quoted Knesset Member Talab El-Sana (United Arab List) as saying Thursday that he returned from a visit to Syria with a message of peace. El-Sana traveled to Damascus against the instructions of Israel's Interior Minister Ophir Pines-Paz, and delivered a speech to the Syrian Parliament.

Maariv quoted experts from Israel's Antiquities Authority as saying that the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem are in danger of collapsing.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Yiftah Shapir, editor of the Middle East Military Balance at Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, as saying on Thursday that the Iranian satellite Sina-1 was too small to be effective as a spying device.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Raed Salah, the firebrand leader of the northern branch of Israel's Islamic Movement, has decided not to visit the Al-Aqsa Mosque today, but at a later date.

Yediot reported that the U.S. administration is pressing Britain to amend its legislation that allows arrests of IDF officers. The newspaper says that the U.S. fears similar steps against senior Americans

involved in the Afghanistan and Iraq operations. Yediot also reported that a delegation of Israeli Justice Ministry officials is secretly visiting the UK to reach an understanding on the issue.

Yediot reported that over 100 Israelis receive organs from transplants in China annually. The newspaper notes that China uses organs removed from the bodies of executed prisoners.

Ha'aretz (English Edition) reported that the format of the Graduate Record Examination, the standardized entrance test for U.S. graduate schools, is to change drastically from October 2006. The newspaper wrote that the test will no longer include analogies and will involve more reading comprehension.

A Yediot/Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll:  
- "Were elections for the Knesset held today, with Sharon running in an independent party and Netanyahu heading the Likud, for whom would you vote?" (Results in Knesset seats -- in brackets, seats in the current Knesset.)  
- Sharon's party 28; Labor Party 28 (22); Likud 18 (40); Shas 7 (11); Shinui 6-7 (14); United Torah Judaism 6 (5); Meretz 5-6 (6); Yisrael Beiteinu 5 (3); National Union 4 (4); National Religious Party 3 (6); Arab parties 9.  
- If Sharon continues to head the Likud, that party would get 38 seats and the Labor Party 28 seats. Maariv printed the results of a TNS/Teleseker Polling Institute survey:  
- "Were elections for the Knesset held today, for whom would you vote?" (Results in Knesset seats.)  
(With a Sharon-led Likud): Likud 38; Labor 27; Shinui 10; Shas 10; National Union 7; Meretz 6; United Torah Judaism 5; Yisrael Beiteinu 5; National Religious Party 4; Arab parties 8.  
(With a Netanyahu-led Likud): Likud 33; Labor 33; Shinui 12; Shas 10; National Union 6; Meretz 6; United Torah Judaism 5; Yisrael Beiteinu 5; National Religious Party 4; Arab parties 7.  
- "Should [Israel] return to the Oslo course and start negotiating over a final-status [agreement] with the Palestinians?" Opposed: 53 percent; in favor: 43 percent.

#### 1. Labor vs. Likud:

##### Summary:

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Remaining in the Likud would force Sharon to be hawkish up to the elections, and handcuffed by the rebels who will pull out their knives after he wins for them."

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "What is more important than the number of lists that will compete in the upcoming elections is the fact that they must ascend the stage without masks, make-up, or pretenses."

##### Block Quotes:

#### I. "Thanks For the Longest Week in Years"

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (November 18): "When did we ever have anything like it? Within one week, a new Labor Party chairman has changed the entire political menu. In his first days in office, he decided the fate of the unity government, and thus the early elections.... [A few days later,] the Likud ... hurried to pour water on the internal fires that threatened to destroy it. And on Thursday, Peretz finished a week of squeezing the Prime Minister Arik, King of Israel, after forcing him to advance the elections.... Remaining in the Likud would force Sharon to be hawkish up to the elections, and handcuffed by the rebels who will pull out their knives after he wins for them. Nearly half the sample in one of this week's polls wanted Sharon to leave the Likud and form a new party. They are for him, against his home party. Nonetheless, there's always a long fuse between the awakening of the Israeli awareness for a necessary change and the beginning of translating it into votes at the ballot box. It is very possible that this process won't have enough time to ripen in the three to four months until elections. By accelerating the timetable, Peretz also managed in effect to make it difficult for Sharon to quit the Likud and run against him. A new party can't be established in a month. The

rest is a matter of guesswork and polls that sometimes aren't much better than guessing. Meanwhile, what's just begun is quite enough. Amir Peretz is already deserving of thanks for the longest week in recent years."

## II. "Take Off the Masks"

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (November 18): "The [Israeli] voter is entitled to know ... whether the Likud could support a unilateral withdrawal to the separation barrier as Israel's final border, with or without American agreement, and whether the Roadmap leads to the establishment of a Palestinian state.... The Labor Party, too, must be faithful to reality. Amir Peretz supports the Geneva Accord? If so, he must fight for it and try to convince the public to accept it unambiguously.... What is more important than the number of lists that will compete in the upcoming elections is the fact that they must ascend the stage without masks, make-up, or pretenses."

### 12. Gaza: Management of Border Crossings:

#### Summary:

Washington correspondent Nathan Guttman wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "This week, at least, the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict was ... the only source of positive news concerning American foreign policy -- something that may just make the hands-on approach an attractive option for the administration."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in mass-circulation, independent Yediot Aharonot: "[Quartet Special Envoy James Wolfensohn] didn't understand ... the difficulty that his Israeli interlocutors had in grasping the fact that the occupation of Gaza is over."

#### Block Quotes:

### 1I. "Condi's Coup"

Washington correspondent Nathan Guttman wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (November 18): "The driving force behind Rice's decision to take the risk and stay in Israel to close the border deal was Quartet Special Envoy James Wolfensohn. The former head of the World Bank had reached the point where he could no longer put up with the closure of the Gaza Strip that threatened to undermine all his efforts to rebuild the Palestinian economy and give hope to the residents of Gaza.... The problem is that secretaries of state who are willing to 'push it over the edge' are hard to come by. The Rice involvement in brokering one deal in the Middle East does not necessarily mean that the Bush administration is changing its policy and will now adopt the practice of mediating international crises.... In a strange way, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might turn out to be the best place for Bush to invest his capital. It is true that this conflict has been a source of anguish to most of those who ever tried to deal with it, but this week, at least, the conflict was also the only source of positive news concerning American foreign policy -- something that may just make the hands-on approach an attractive option for the administration."

## II. "Cries and Whispers"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in mass-circulation, independent Yediot Aharonot (November 18): "Quartet Envoy James Wolfensohn started the negotiations as a warm Jew, an Israel-lover, and a peace-seeker, and concluded them as someone who is fed up with both sides. He was mainly angry with the Palestinians, for not arranging their security affairs.... He didn't understand the Israelis' lack of concern for the human distress in Gaza and the possibility that Hamas might win the elections ... and the difficulty that his Israeli interlocutors had in grasping the fact that the occupation of Gaza is over.... When he threatened to resign for the first time, Sharon was startled and called up. He feared that Wolfensohn would enlist the Bush administration against him. A few days ago, when Wolfensohn again threatened to resign, Sharon contented himself with waving at him in a conciliatory gesture.... Wolfensohn's cries of despair jolted the U.S. administration. Weisglass was dispatched to calm Washington. He promised Rice that she would get the

yearned-for agreement from Israel."

JONES